

US009767894B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Tang et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 9,767,894 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Sep. 19, 2017**

(54) **PROGRAMMING MEMORIES WITH STEPPED PROGRAMMING PULSES**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this
patent is extended or adjusted under 35
U.S.C. 154(b) by 101 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **14/299,074**

(22) Filed: **Jun. 9, 2014**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2015/0357031 A1 Dec. 10, 2015

(51) **Int. Cl.**

G06F 12/00 (2006.01)
G11C 11/56 (2006.01)
G06F 12/02 (2006.01)
G06F 3/06 (2006.01)
G11C 16/34 (2006.01)
G11C 16/04 (2006.01)
G11C 16/12 (2006.01)
G11C 16/10 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC **G11C 11/5628** (2013.01); **G06F 3/0625**
(2013.01); **G06F 3/0659** (2013.01); **G06F**
3/0688 (2013.01); **G06F 12/0246** (2013.01);
G11C 16/0483 (2013.01); **G11C 16/12**
(2013.01); **G11C 16/3459** (2013.01); **G11C**
16/10 (2013.01); **G11C 16/3404** (2013.01);
G11C 2211/5621 (2013.01); **G11C 2211/5622**
(2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC G11C 11/5628; G11C 2211/5621; G11C
16/10; G11C 16/0483; G11C 16/3459;
G11C 16/3454; G11C 16/12; G11C
16/3404; G11C 2211/5622

USPC 365/185; 711/105
See application file for complete search history.

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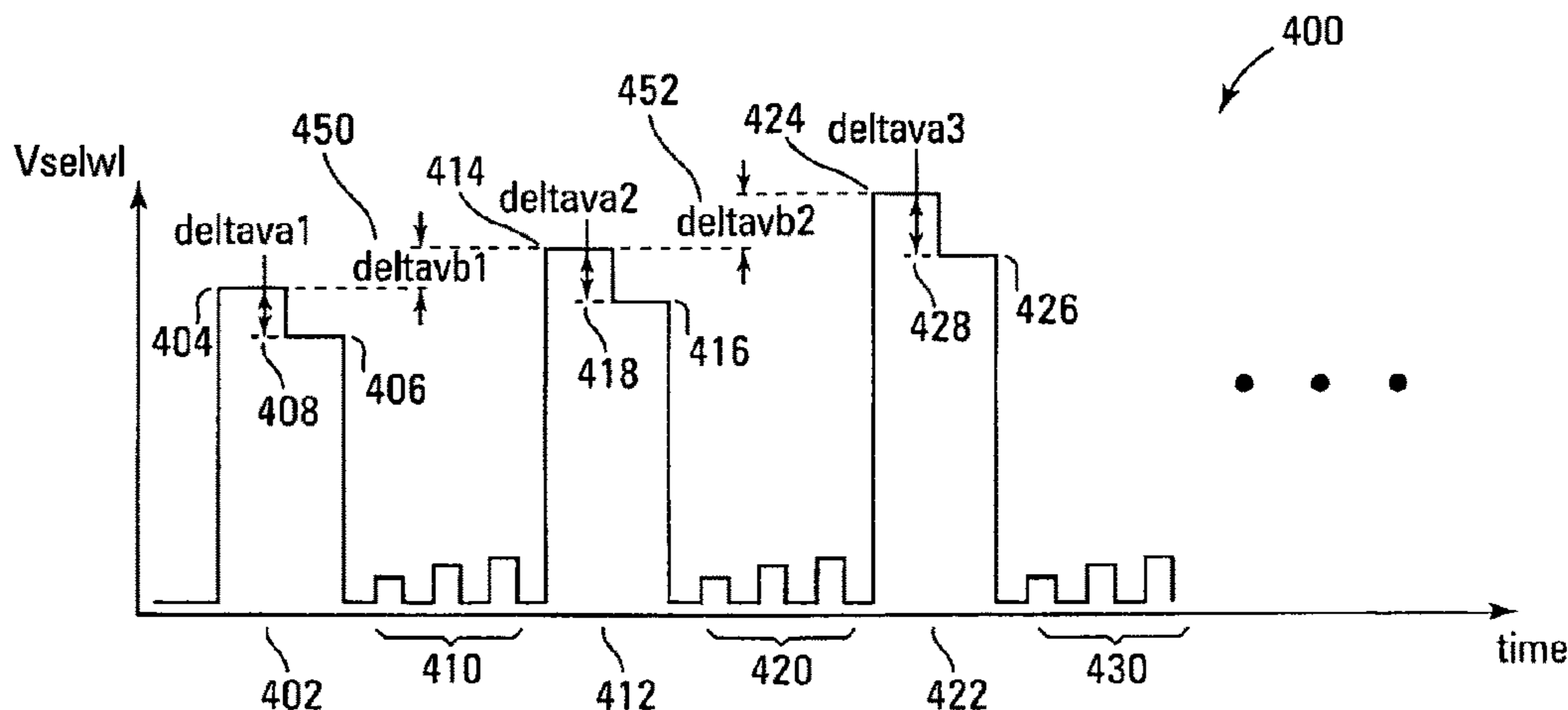
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PLLC

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Memories and methods for programming memories with
multi-step programming pulses are provided. One method
includes applying a plurality of programming pulses to cells
of the memory device to be programmed, with each pro-
gramming pulse of the plurality of programming pulses
being configured to contribute towards programming a cell
of the plurality of cells to each data state of a plurality of
programmed data states. A first portion of each program-
ming pulse is used to program certain cells towards a target
data state associated with a first threshold voltage level, and
a later portion of each programming pulse is used to program
other cells towards a target data state associated with a
second threshold voltage level that is lower than the first
threshold voltage level.

24 Claims, 14 Drawing Sheets



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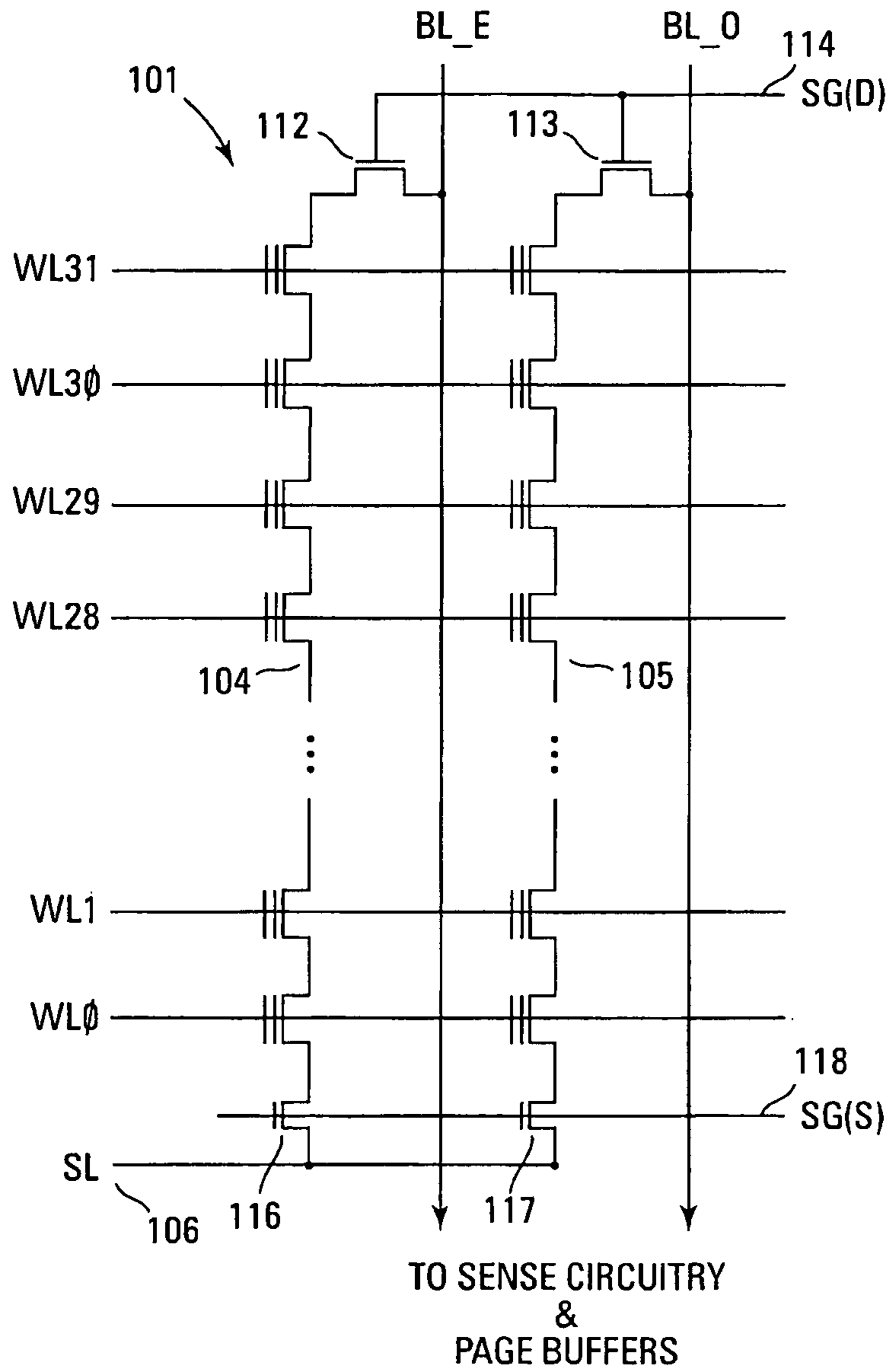


FIG. 1

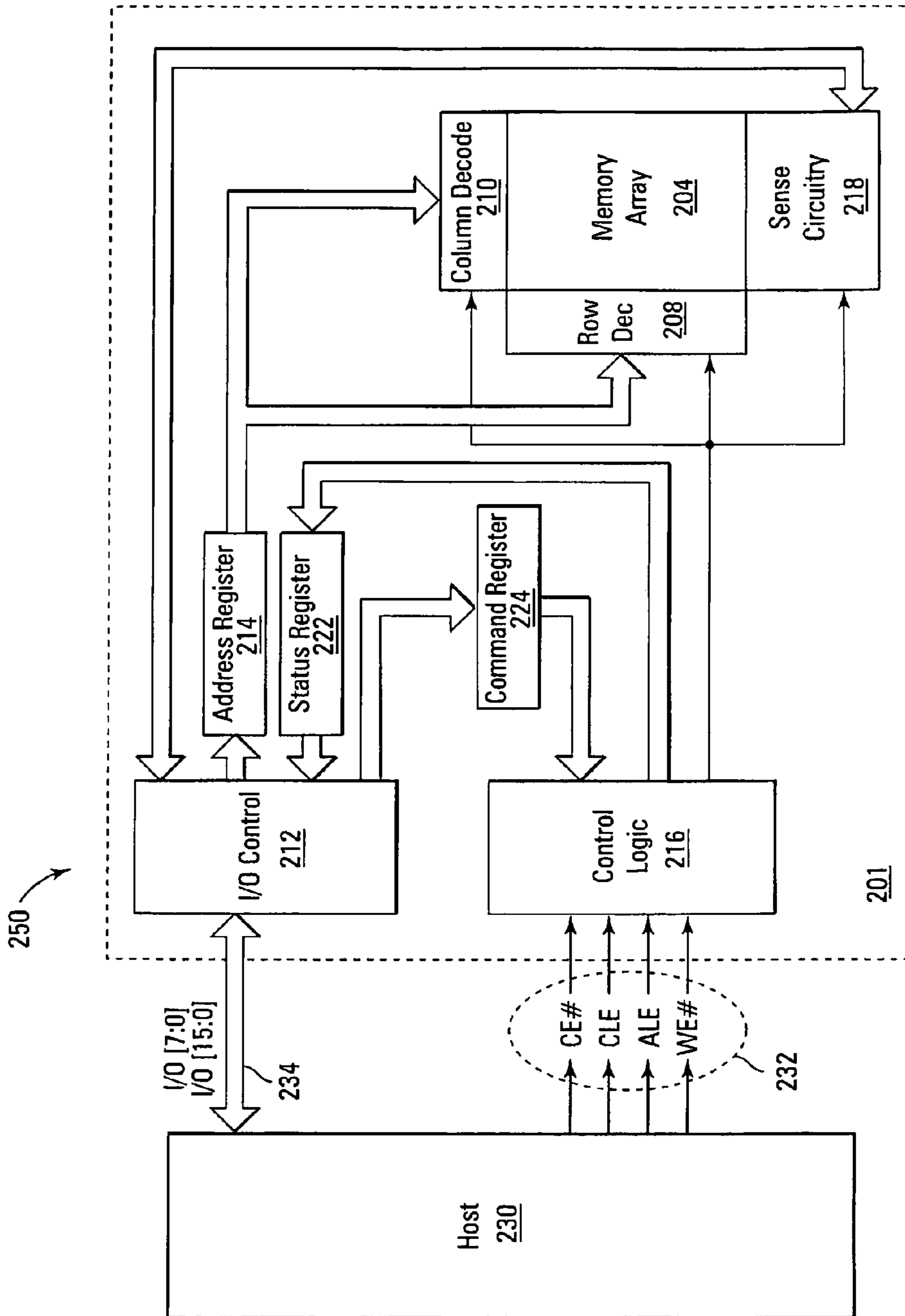


FIG. 2

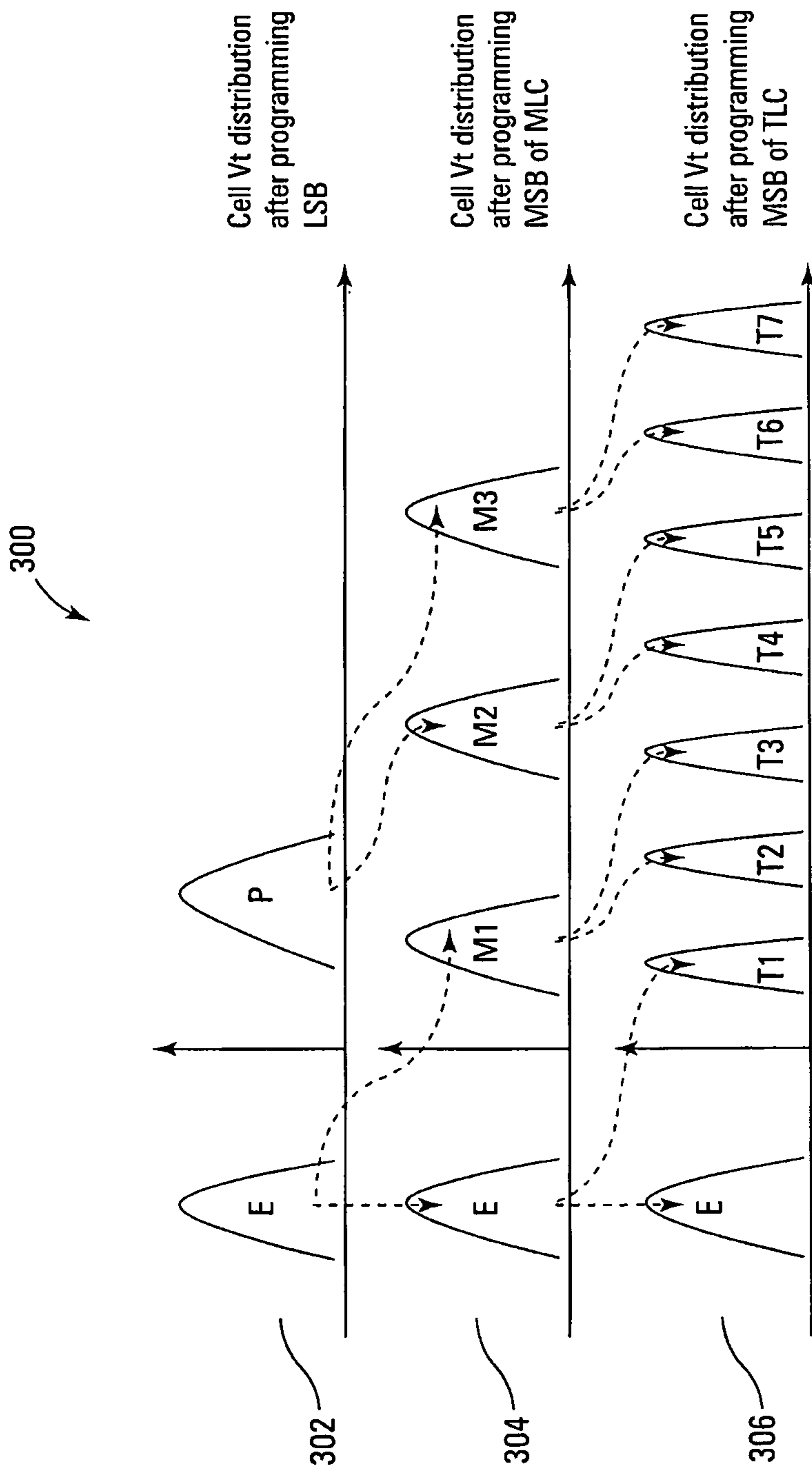


FIG. 3

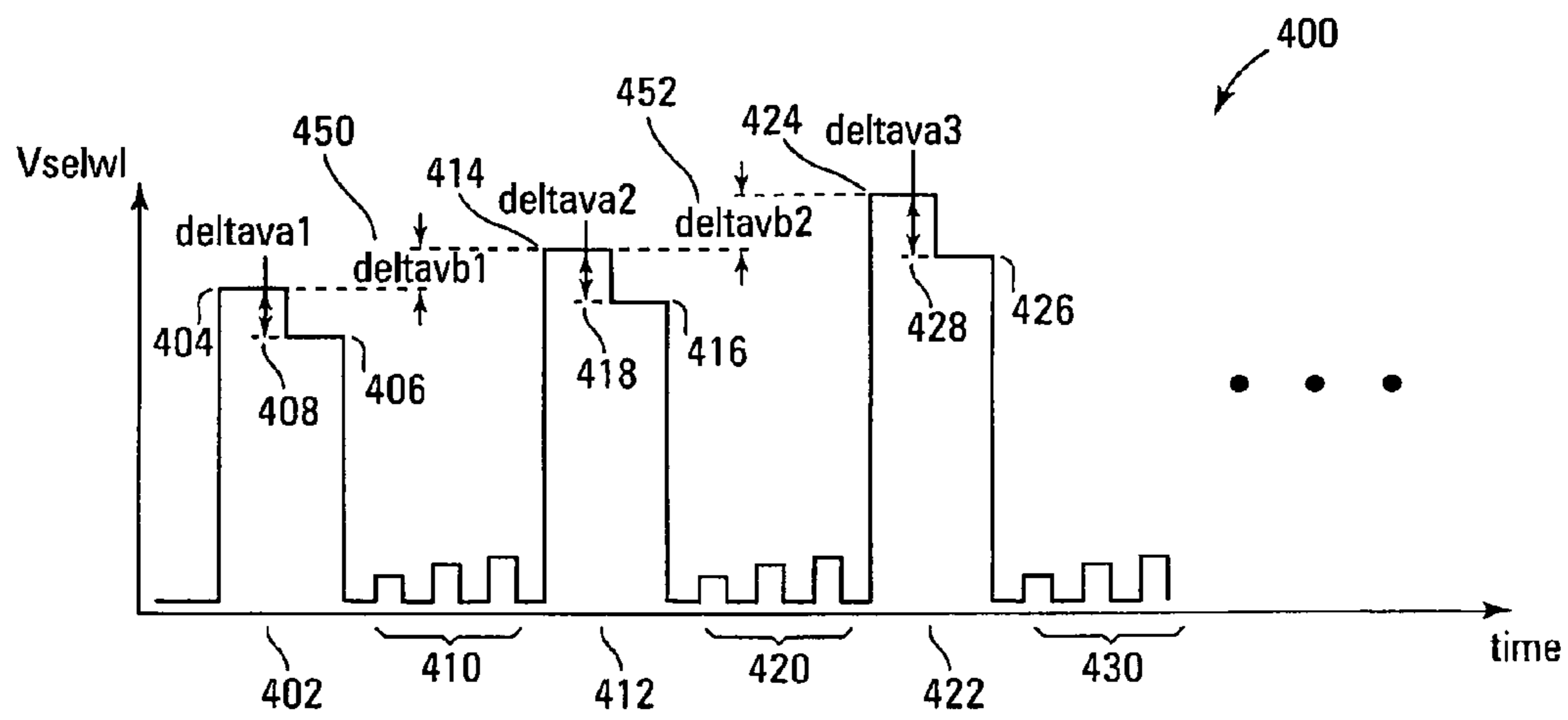


FIG. 4

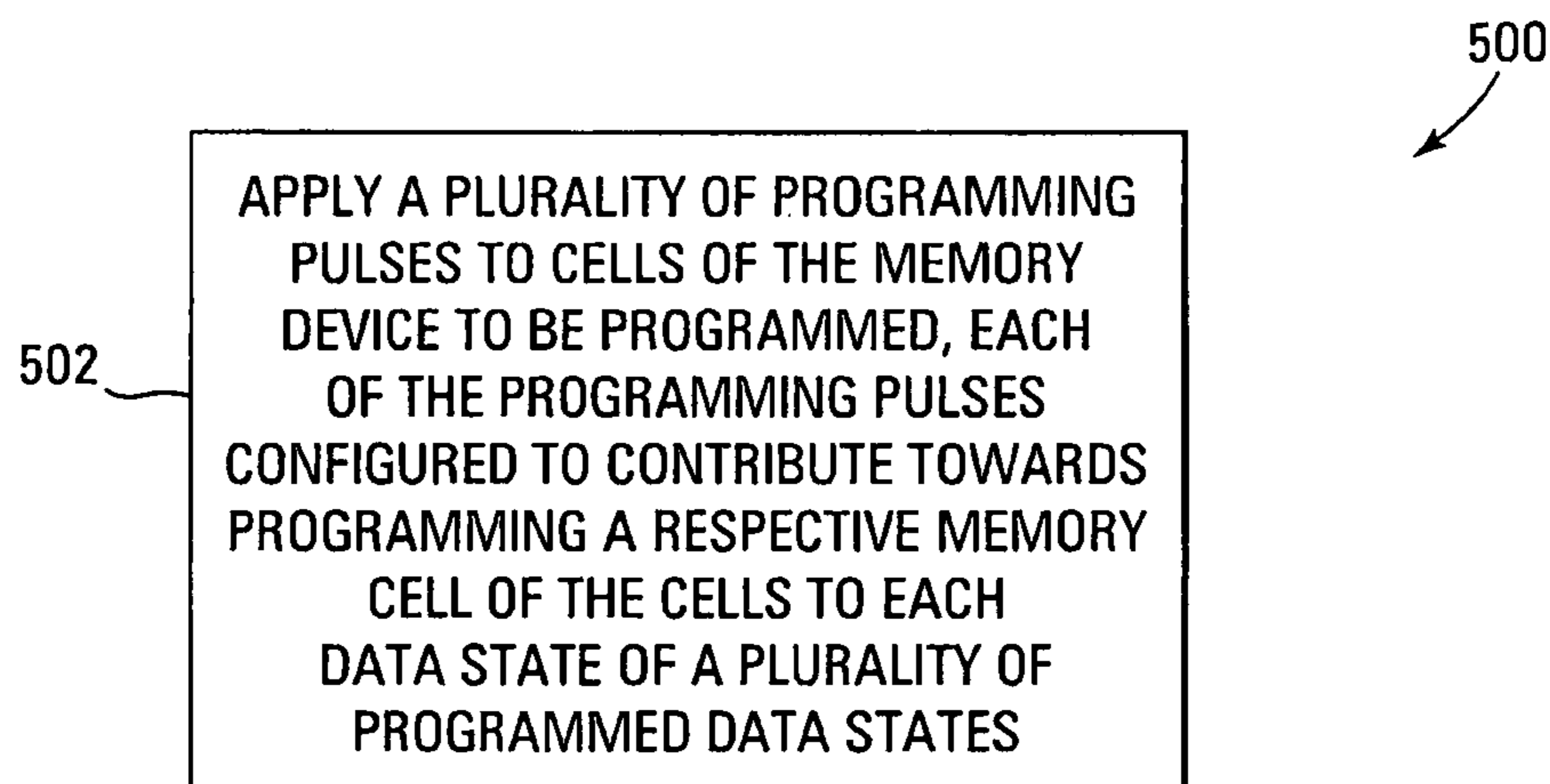


FIG. 5

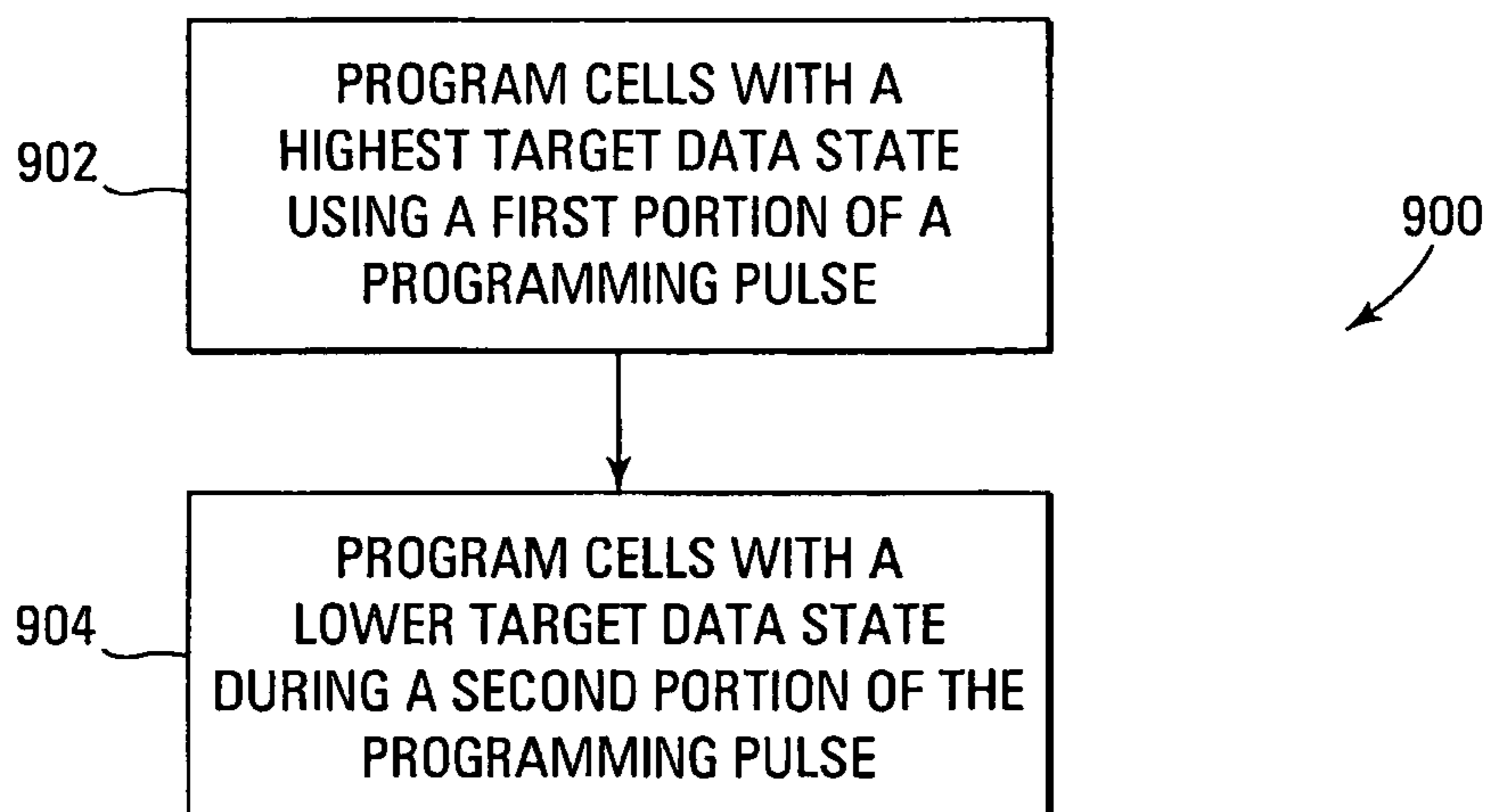


FIG. 9

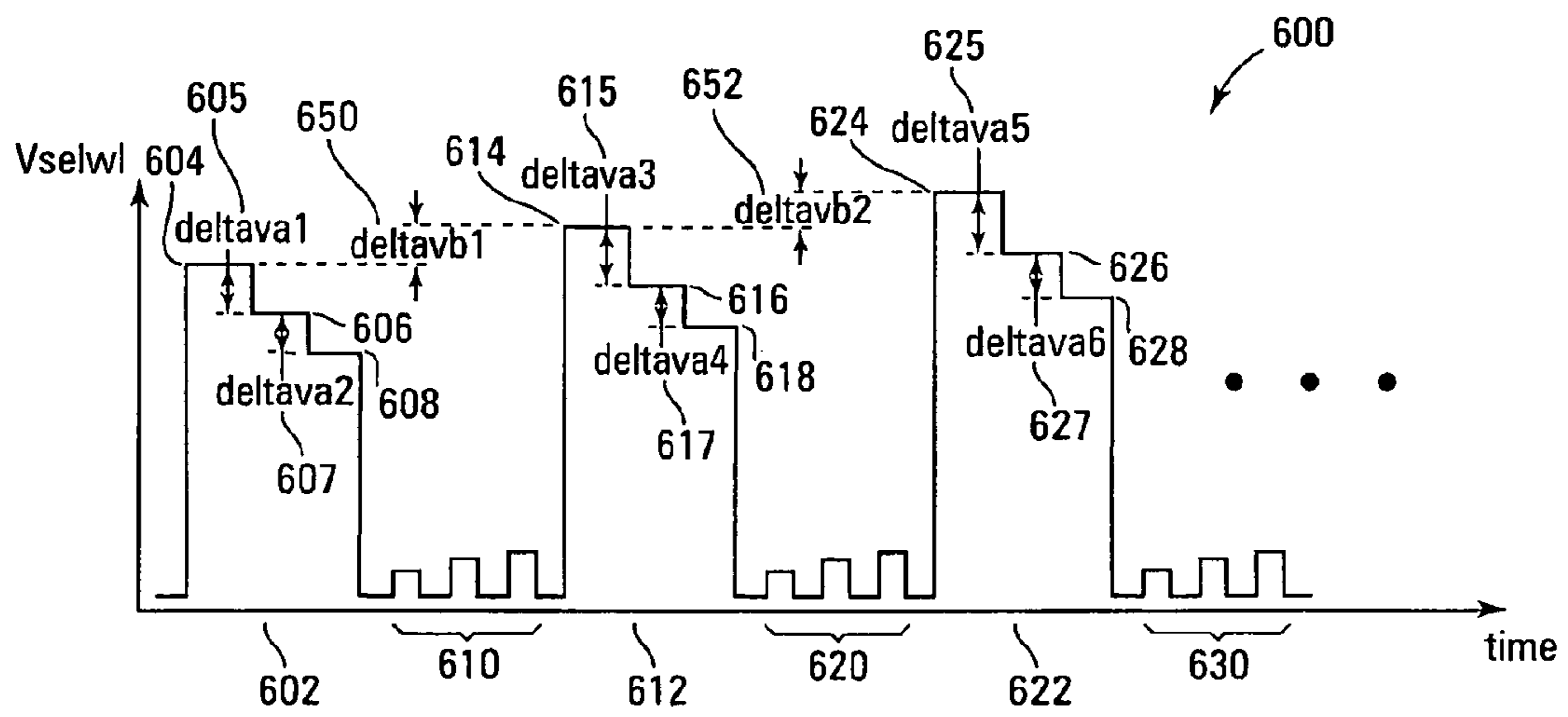


FIG. 6

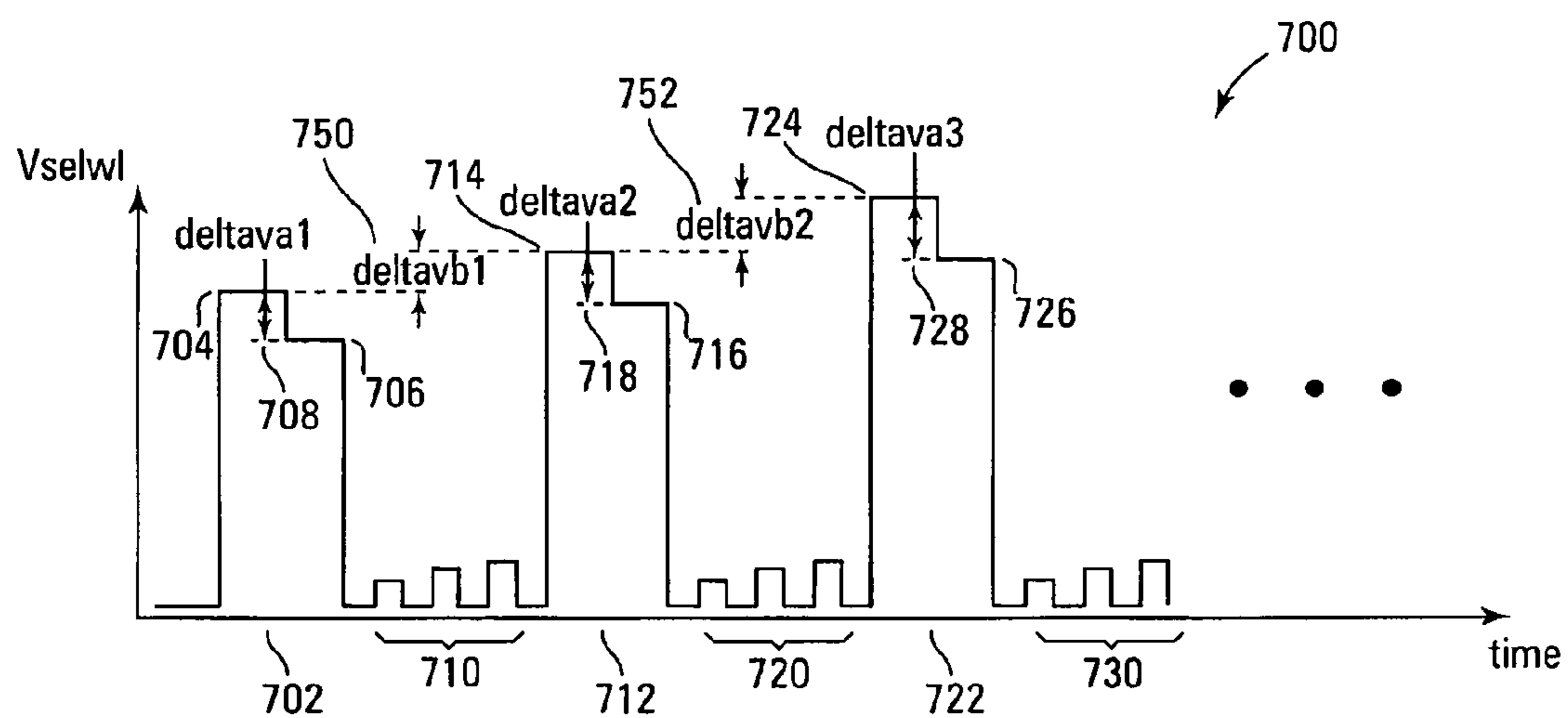


FIG. 7

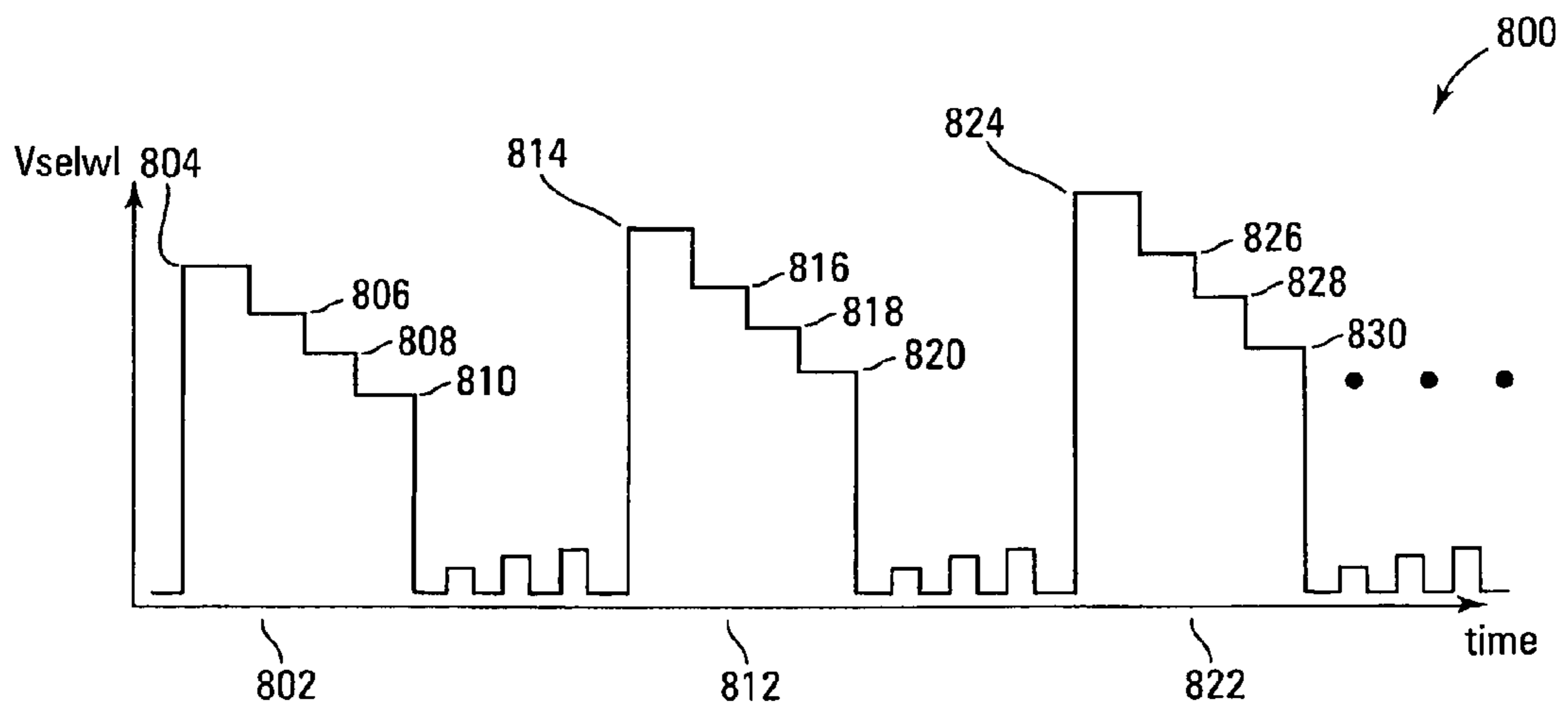
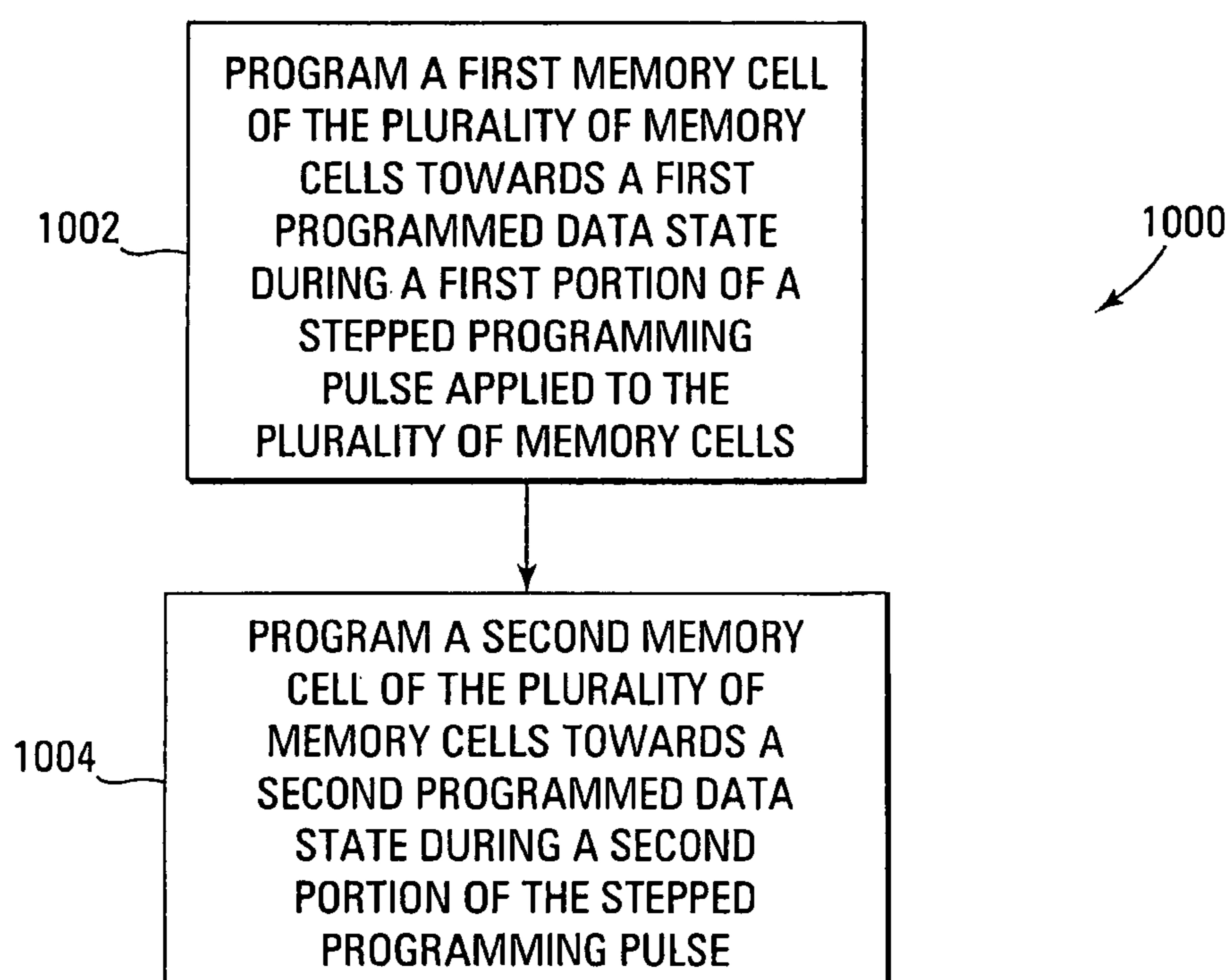


FIG. 8

**FIG. 10**

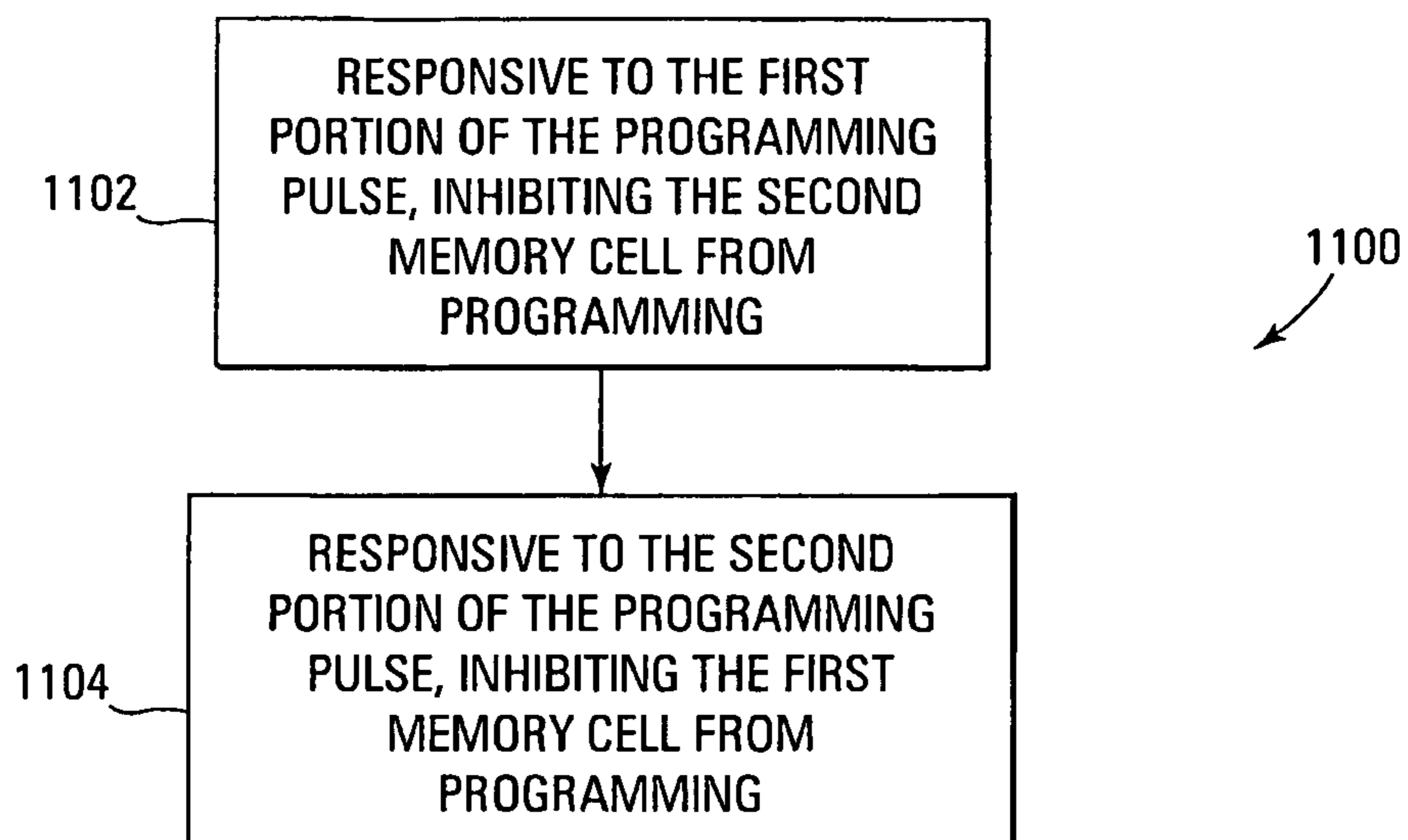


FIG. 11

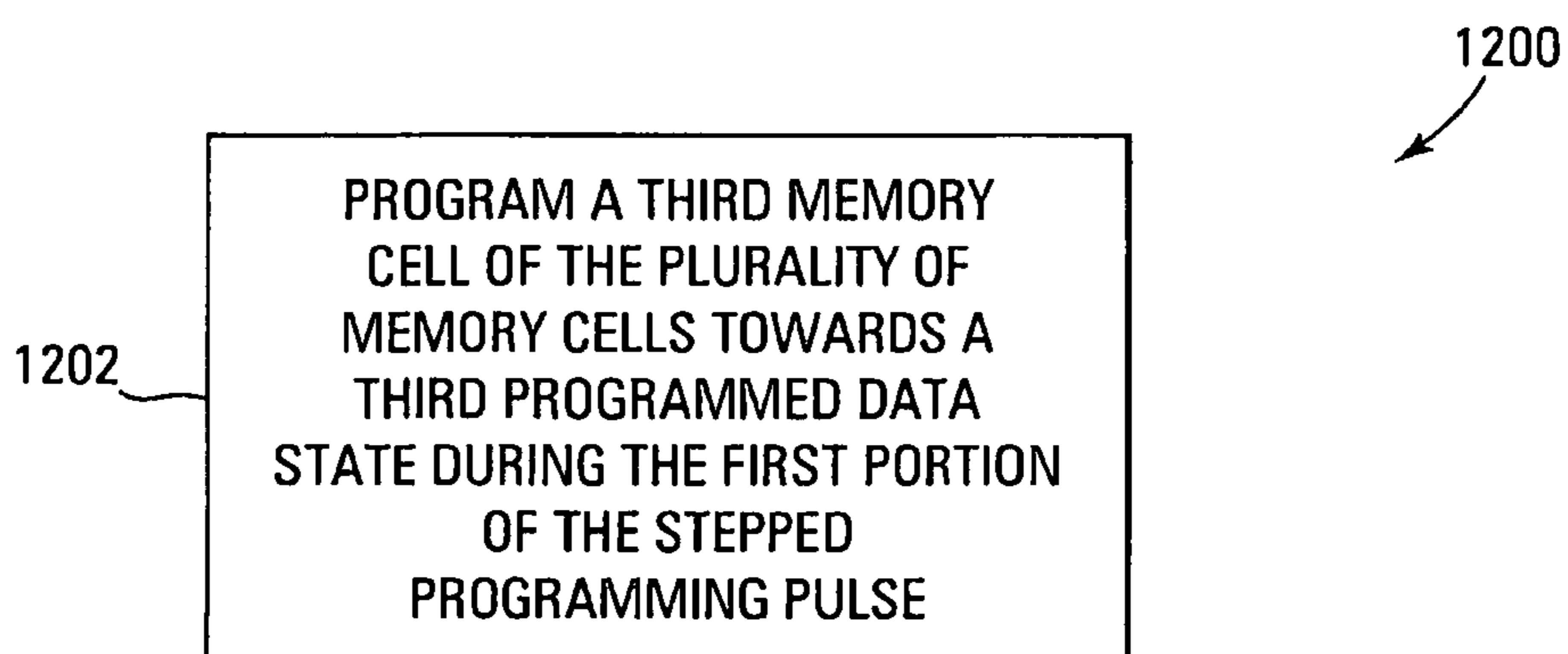
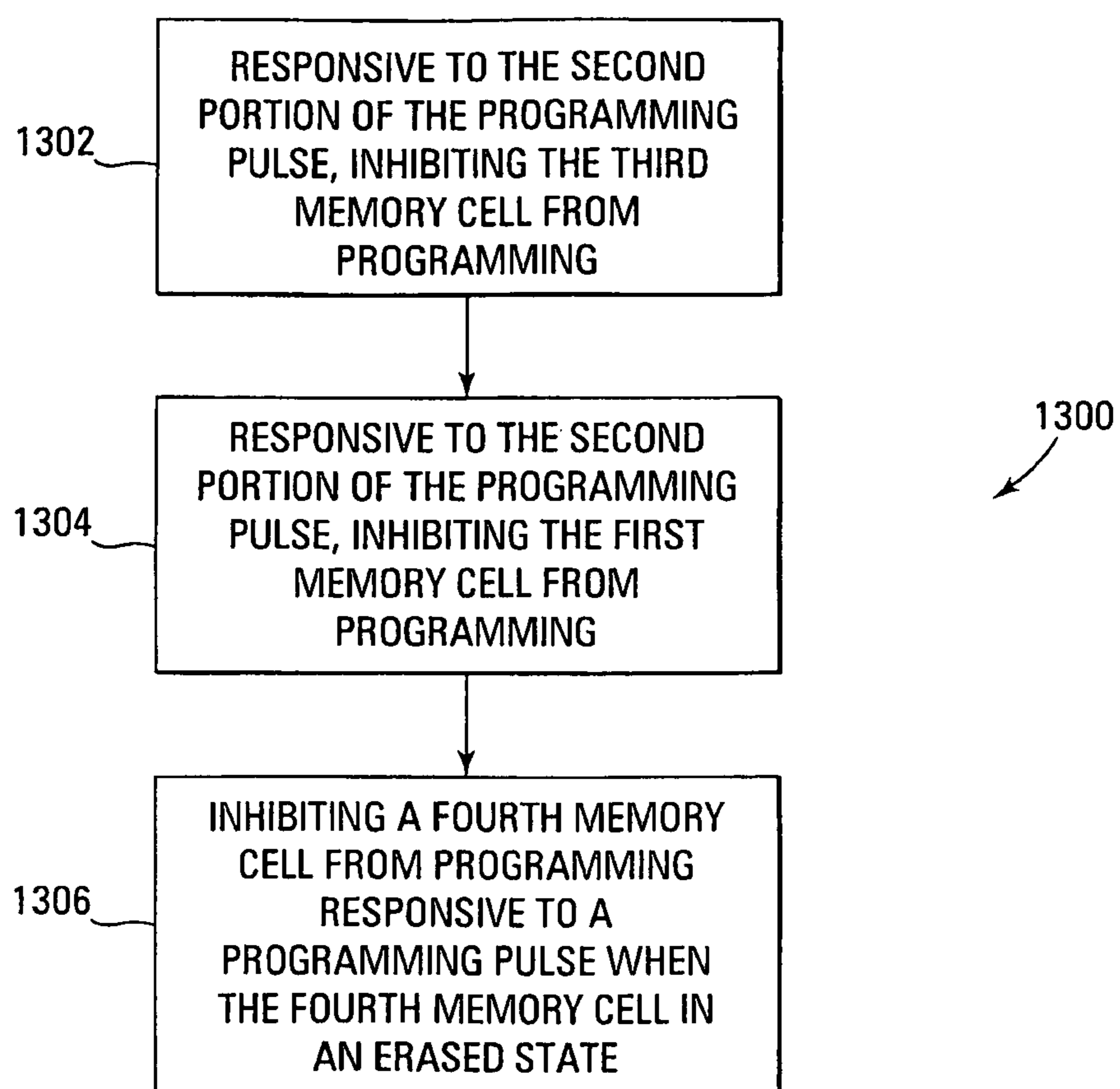


FIG. 12

**FIG. 13**

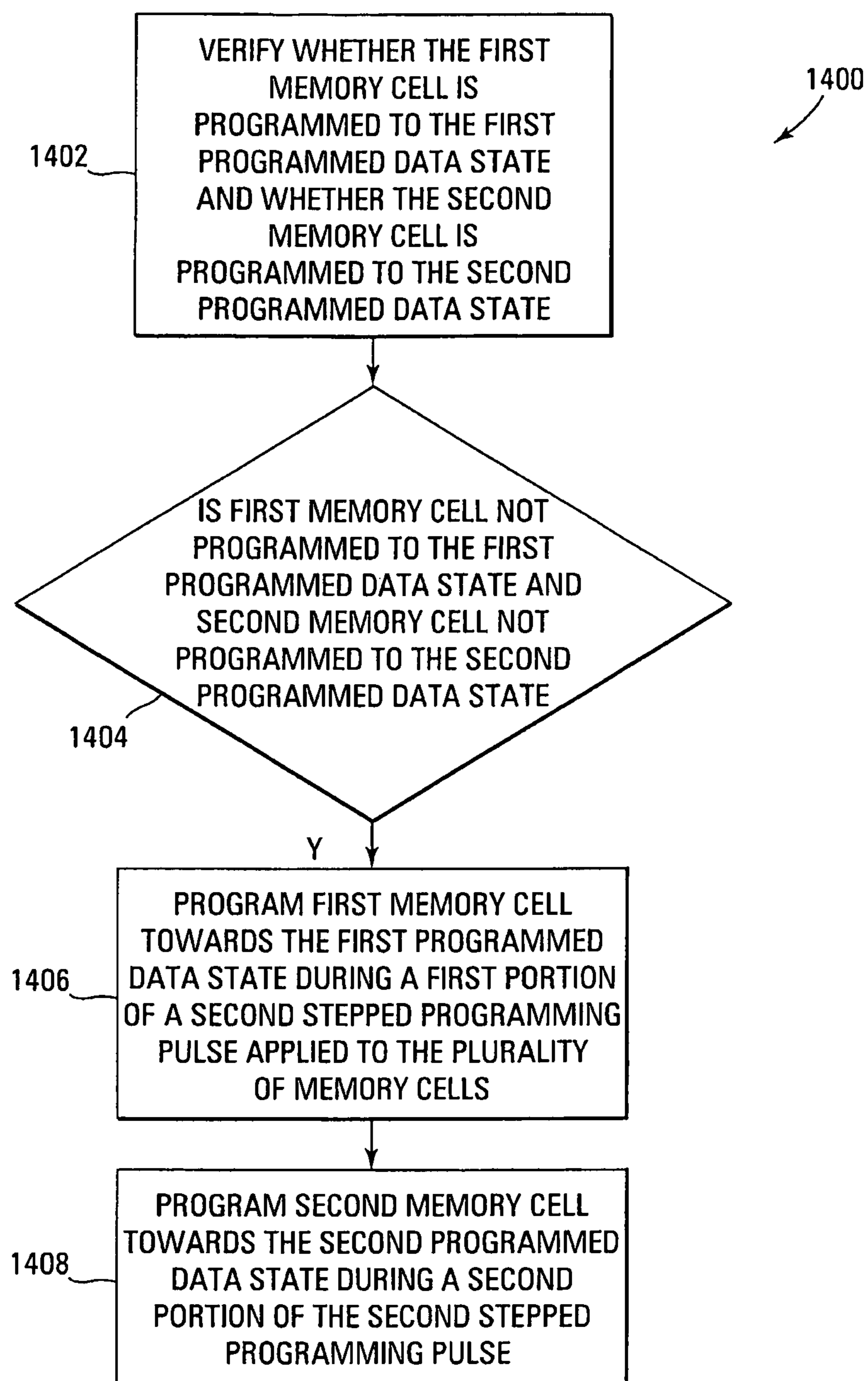
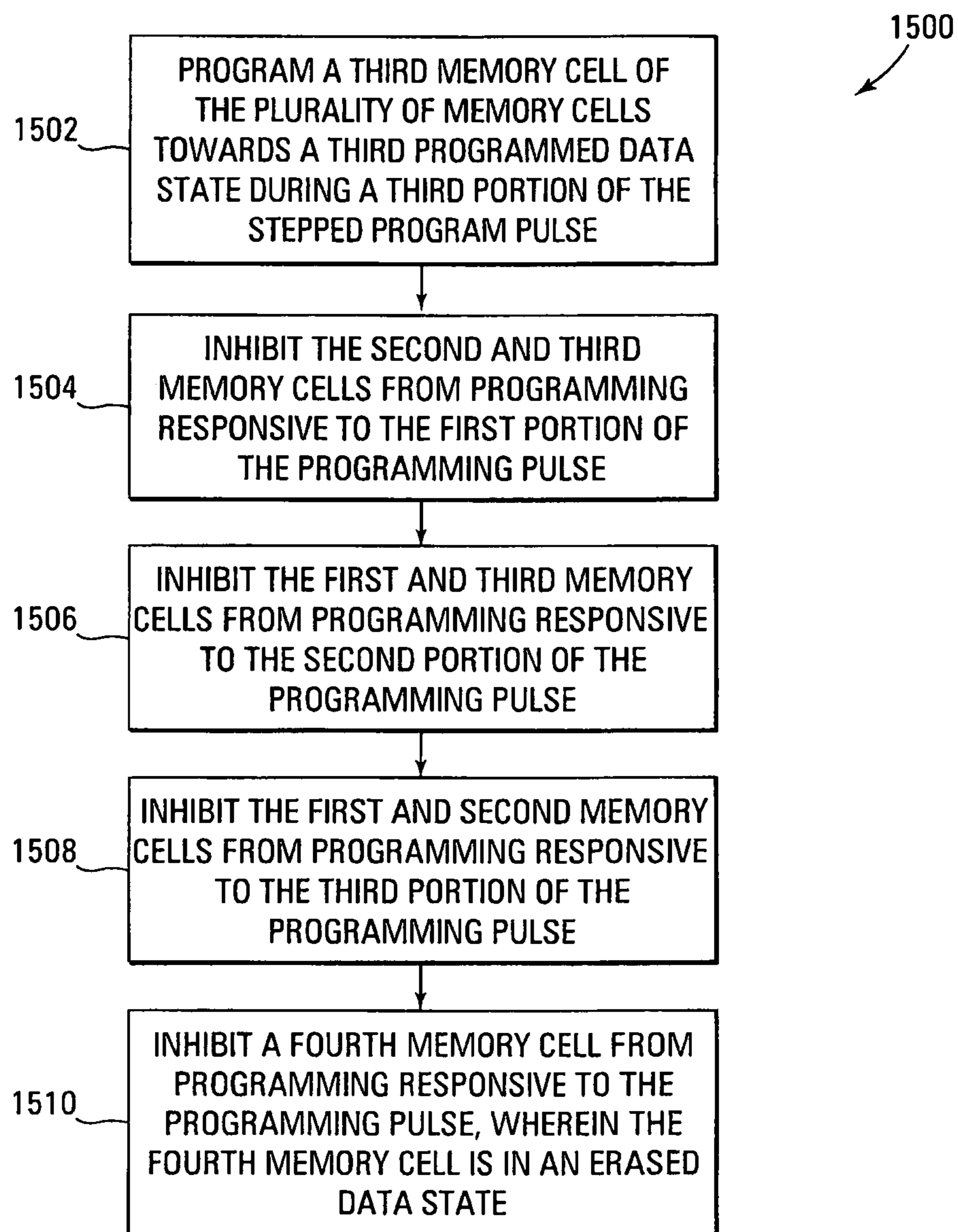
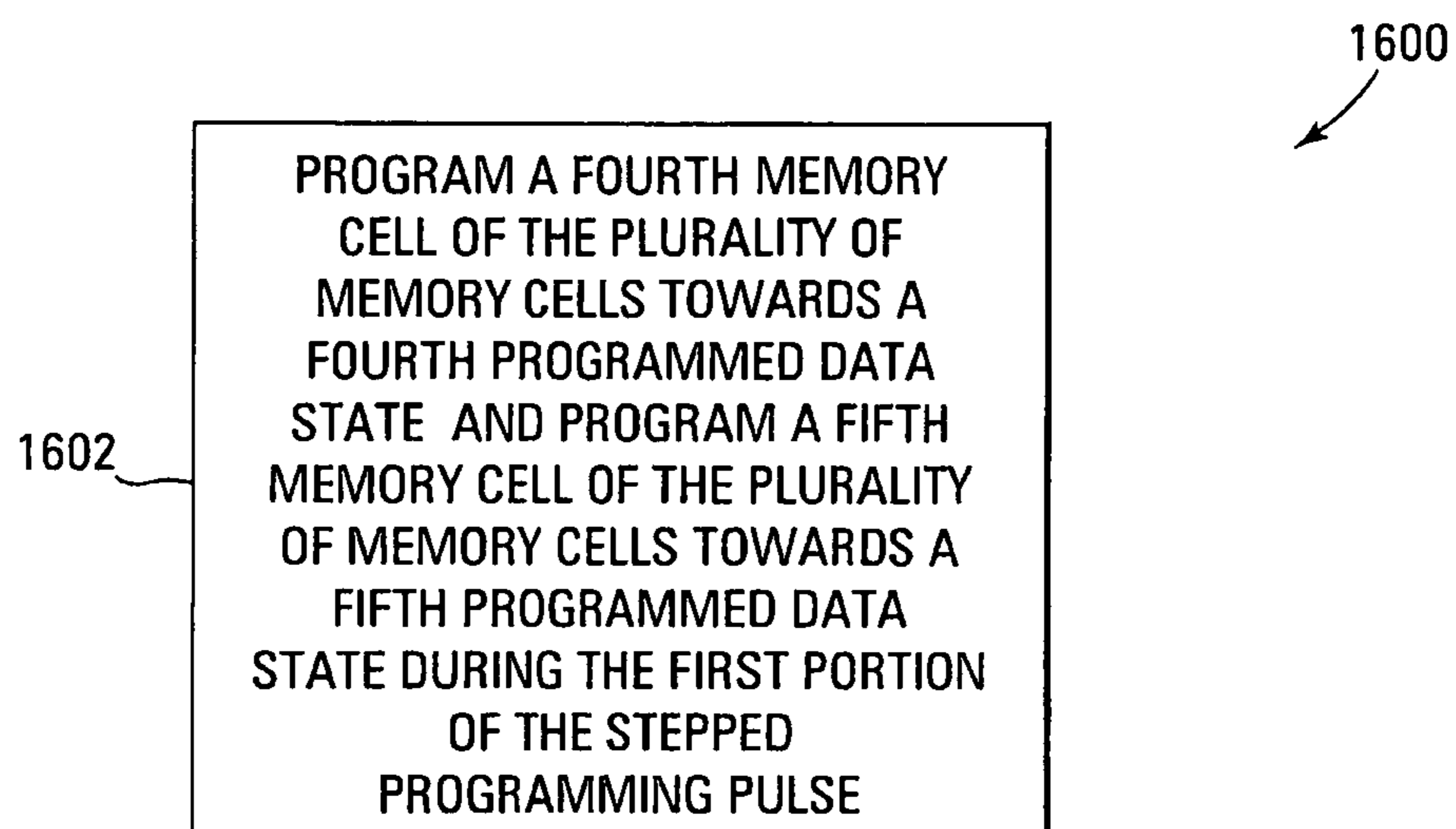


FIG. 14

**FIG. 15**

**FIG. 16**

1

**PROGRAMMING MEMORIES WITH
STEPPED PROGRAMMING PULSES**

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present embodiments relate generally to memory devices and a particular embodiment relates to programming in memory devices.

BACKGROUND

Memory devices (which are sometimes referred to herein as “memories”) are typically provided as internal, semiconductor, integrated circuits in computers or other electronic systems. There are many different types of memory including random-access memory (RAM), read only memory (ROM), dynamic random access memory (DRAM), synchronous dynamic random access memory (SDRAM), and flash memory.

Flash memory devices have developed into a popular source of non-volatile memory for a wide range of electronic applications. Flash memory devices typically use a one-transistor memory cell that allows for high memory densities, high reliability, and low power consumption. Changes in threshold voltage of the cells, through programming of a charge storage structure, such as floating gates or trapping layers or other physical phenomena, determine the data state of each cell. Common electronic systems that utilize flash memory devices include, but are not limited to, personal computers, personal digital assistants (PDAs), digital cameras, digital media players, digital recorders, games, appliances, vehicles, wireless devices, cellular telephones, and removable memory modules, and the uses for flash memory continue to expand.

Flash memory typically utilizes one of two basic architectures known as NOR flash and NAND flash. The designation is derived from the logic used to read the devices. In NOR flash architecture, a string of memory cells is coupled in parallel with each memory cell coupled to a data line, such as those typically referred to as digit (e.g., bit) lines. In NAND flash architecture, a string of memory cells is coupled in series with only the first memory cell of the string coupled to a bit line.

As the performance and complexity of electronic systems increase, the requirement for additional memory in a system also increases. However, in order to continue to reduce the costs of the system, the parts count must be kept to a minimum. This can be accomplished by increasing the memory density of an integrated circuit by using such technologies as multilevel cells (MLC). For example, MLC NAND flash memory is a very cost effective non-volatile memory.

Programming in memories is typically accomplished by applying a plurality of programming pulses, separated by verify pulses, to program each memory cell of a selected group of memory cells to a respective target data state (which may be an interim or final data state). With such a scheme, the programming pulses are applied to access lines, such as those typically referred to as word lines, for selected cells. After each programming pulse, a verify pulse of plurality of verify pulses are used to verify the programming of the selected cells. Current programming uses many programming pulses in an incremental step pulse programming scheme, where each programming pulse is a single pulse that moves cell threshold voltage by a certain amount. In a four level MLC, there are four potential final data states. Before each programming pulse, word lines are precharged, and

2

after each programming pulse, the word lines are discharged. This uses high voltage, which is at a premium as memory supply voltages shrink, and consumes power and time.

For the reasons stated above and for other reasons that will become apparent to those skilled in the art upon reading and understanding the present specification, there is a need in the art for improved programming in memories.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram of one embodiment of a portion of a NAND architecture memory array;

FIG. 2 is a block schematic of an electronic system in accordance with an embodiment of the disclosure;

FIG. 3 is a diagram of typical data states for different types of memory cells;

FIG. 4 is a diagram of a programming operation according to one embodiment of the present disclosure;

FIG. 5 is a flow chart diagram of a method according to one embodiment of the present disclosure;

FIG. 6 is a diagram of a programming operation according to another embodiment of the present disclosure;

FIG. 7 is a diagram of a programming operation according to another embodiment of the present disclosure;

FIG. 8 is a diagram of a programming operation according to another embodiment of the present disclosure;

FIG. 9 is a flow chart diagram of a method according to another embodiment of the present disclosure;

FIG. 10 is a flow chart diagram of a method according to another embodiment of the present disclosure;

FIG. 11 is a flow chart diagram of a method according to another embodiment of the present disclosure;

FIG. 12 is a flow chart diagram of a method according to another embodiment of the present disclosure;

FIG. 13 is a flow chart diagram of a method according to another embodiment of the present disclosure;

FIG. 14 is a flow chart diagram of a method according to another embodiment of the present disclosure;

FIG. 15 is a flow chart diagram of a method according to another embodiment of the present disclosure; and

FIG. 16 is a flow chart diagram of a method according to another embodiment of the present disclosure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In the following detailed description, reference is made to the accompanying drawings that form a part hereof and in which is shown, by way of illustration, specific embodiments. In the drawings, like numerals describe substantially similar components throughout the several views. Other embodiments may be utilized and structural, logical, and electrical changes may be made without departing from the scope of the present disclosure. The following detailed description is, therefore, not to be taken in a limiting sense.

Non-volatile memory can utilize different architectures including NOR and NAND. The architecture designation is derived from the logic used to read the devices. In NOR architecture, a logical column of memory cells is coupled in parallel with each memory cell coupled to a data line, such as those typically referred to as bit lines. In NAND architecture, a column of memory cells is coupled in series with only the first memory cell of the column coupled to a bit line.

FIG. 1 illustrates a schematic diagram of one embodiment of a portion of a NAND architecture memory array 101 comprising series strings of non-volatile memory cells.

The memory array **101** comprises an array of non-volatile memory cells (e.g., floating gate) arranged in columns such as series strings **104**, **105**. Each of the cells is coupled drain to source in each series string **104**, **105**. An access line (e.g., word line) **WL0-WL31** that spans across multiple series strings **104**, **105** is coupled to the control gates of each memory cell in a row in order to bias the control gates of the memory cells in the row. Data lines, such as even/odd bit lines **BL_E**, **BL_O**, are coupled to the series strings and eventually coupled to sense circuitry that detect and store the state of each cell by sensing current or voltage on a selected bit line.

Each series string **104**, **105** of memory cells is coupled to a source line **106** by a source select gate **116**, **117** (e.g., transistor) and to an individual bit line **BL_E**, **BL_O** by a drain select gate **112**, **113** (e.g., transistor). The source select gates **116**, **117** are controlled by a source select gate control line **SG(S)** **118** coupled to their control gates. The drain select gates **112**, **113** are controlled by a drain select gate control line **SG(D)** **114**.

FIG. **2** is a simplified block diagram of a memory device **201** according to an embodiment of the disclosure, and on which various embodiments of the disclosure can be practiced. Memory device **201** includes an array of memory cells **204** arranged in rows and columns. Although the various embodiments will be described primarily with reference to NAND memory arrays, the various embodiments are not limited to a specific architecture of the memory array **204**. Some examples of other array architectures suitable for the present embodiments include NOR arrays, AND arrays, and virtual ground arrays. Further, the embodiments described herein are amenable for use with SLC and MLC memories without departing from the scope of the disclosure. Also, the methods are applicable for memories which could be read/sensed in analog format.

Row decode circuitry **208** and column decode circuitry **210** are provided to decode address signals provided to the memory device **201**. Address signals are received and decoded to access memory array **204**. Memory device **201** also includes input/output (I/O) control circuitry **212** to manage input of commands, addresses and data to the memory device **201** as well as output of data and status information from the memory device **201**. An address register **214** is coupled between I/O control circuitry **212** and row decode circuitry **208** and column decode circuitry **210** to latch the address signals prior to decoding. A command register **224** is coupled between I/O control circuitry **212** and control logic **216** (which may include the elements and code of host **230**) to latch incoming commands. In one embodiment, control logic **216**, I/O control circuitry **212** and/or firmware or other circuitry can individually, in combination, or in combination with other elements, form an internal controller. As used herein, however, a controller need not necessarily include any or all of such components. In some embodiments, a controller can comprise an internal controller (e.g., located on the same die as the memory array) and/or an external controller. Control logic **216** controls access to the memory array **204** in response to the commands and generates status information for an external host such as a host **230**. The control logic **216** is coupled to row decode circuitry **208** and column decode circuitry **210** to control the row decode circuitry **208** and column decode circuitry **210** in response to the received address signals.

A status register **222** is coupled between I/O control circuitry **212** and control logic **216** to latch the status information for output to an external controller.

Memory device **201** receives control signals at control logic **216** over a control link **232**. The control signals may include a chip enable **CE#**, a command latch enable **CLE**, an address latch enable **ALE**, and a write enable **WE#**. Memory device **201** may receive commands (in the form of command signals), addresses (in the form of address signals), and data (in the form of data signals) from an external controller over a multiplexed input/output (I/O) bus **234** and output data to an external controller over I/O bus **234**. I/O bus **234** is also used in one embodiment to signal physically to the host **230** that housekeeping is indicated.

In a specific example, commands are received over input/output (I/O) pins [7:0] of I/O bus **234** at I/O control circuitry **212** and are written into command register **224**. The addresses are received over input/output (I/O) pins [7:0] of bus **234** at I/O control circuitry **212** and are written into address register **214**. The data may be received over input/output (I/O) pins [7:0] for a device capable of receiving eight parallel signals, or input/output (I/O) pins [15:0] for a device capable of receiving sixteen parallel signals, at I/O control circuitry **212** and are transferred to sense circuitry (e.g., sense amplifiers and page buffers) **218**. Data also may be output over input/output (I/O) pins [7:0] for a device capable of transmitting eight parallel signals or input/output (I/O) pins [15:0] for a device capable of transmitting sixteen parallel signals. It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that additional circuitry and signals can be provided, and that the memory device of FIG. **2** has been simplified to help focus on the embodiments of the disclosure.

Additionally, while the memory device of FIG. **2** has been described in accordance with popular conventions for receipt and output of the various signals, it is noted that the various embodiments are not limited by the specific signals and I/O configurations described. For example, command and address signals could be received at inputs separate from those receiving the data signals, or data signals could be transmitted serially over a single I/O line of I/O bus **234**. Because the data signals represent bit patterns instead of individual bits, serial communication of an 8-bit data signal could be as efficient as parallel communication of eight signals representing individual bits.

Methods for programming may be performed in various embodiments on a memory such as memory device **201**. Such methods are shown and described herein with reference to FIGS. **3-9**.

FIG. **3** shows a distribution **302** showing two data states **E** and **P** (which may correspond to two final data states in a distribution of SLC cells or two intermediate data states in a distribution of MLC cells, such as after LSB programming). Distribution **304** shows four data states **E**, **M1**, **M2** and **M3** (which may correspond to four final data states in a distribution of two-level MLC cells or four intermediate data states in a distribution of higher level MLC cells). Distribution **306** shows eight data states **E**, **T1**, **T2**, **T3**, **T4**, **T5**, **T6**, **T7** (which might correspond to eight final data states in a distribution of three-level MLC cells, such as after MSB programming). In the illustrated distributions, data state **E** corresponds to an “erased” data state (even though the cells in data state **E** may have received some “soft” programming after having been erased, as is performed in some algorithms, for purposes of this application they are still considered to be in an erased data state). Meanwhile, data states **P**, **M1-M3** and **T1-T7** correspond to “programmed” data states.

One embodiment **400** for programming an MLC is shown in FIG. **4**. In this embodiment, each programming pulse **402**, **412**, **422**, . . . , of a plurality of programming pulses has two

voltage levels, starting at a first higher level **404, 414, 424, . . .**, and stepping down to a second lower level **406, 416, 426, . . .**. In one embodiment, the amount the multi-step pulses step down is **408, 418, and 428** for pulses **402, 412, and 422**, respectively. The step-down amounts **408, 418, and 428** are device specific, and are chosen in one embodiment for the threshold voltage difference between data states. After each multi-step programming pulse, a plurality of verify pulses **410, 420, 430, . . .**, are used to determine whether selected cells have reached their target data states. For further programming, the starting voltage for a next multi-step programming pulse is increased by an amount **(450, 452)** over the starting voltage of the previous multi-step programming pulse in one embodiment.

In operation, and as shown in flow chart form in FIG. 5, programming **500** comprises applying a plurality of programming pulses to cells of the memory device to be programmed in block **502**. Each of the plurality of programming pulses is configured to contribute towards programming a respective memory cell of the cells to each data state of a plurality of programmed data states. This is accomplished in one embodiment by providing a multi-step programming pulse. In one embodiment, each step of each of the plurality of programming pulses steps from a higher voltage to a lower voltage, and each step is configured to contribute towards programming a memory cell to at least one of the programmed data states. A single step down may be used, but additional steps may also be used.

For the portion of a multi-step programming pulse that is configured to contribute towards programming a memory cell(s) to a particular one (or more) of the programmed data states, the memory cells targeted for programming to one of the other programmed data states (that receive the programming pulse) are inhibited from programming. In at least one embodiment, cells being programmed to a data state associated with a higher threshold voltage level are inhibited differently than cells being programmed to a data state associated with a lower threshold voltage level. For example, a first portion of a multi-step pulse (e.g., portions corresponding to pulse levels **404, 414, 424**), may be configured to contribute towards programming cells having a target data state of **M2** or **M3** while cells having a target data state of **E** or **M1** are inhibited. Inhibiting the programming of cells having a target data state of **E** or **M1** is accomplished in one embodiment by boosting channel voltages for those cells. A second portion of a multi-step pulse (e.g., portions corresponding to pulse levels **406, 416, 426**), may be configured to contribute towards programming cells having a target data state of **M1** while cells having a target data state of **E, M2** or **M3** are inhibited. Inhibiting the programming of cells having a target data state of **E** is again accomplished in one embodiment by boosting channel voltages for those cells. Inhibiting the programming of cells having a target data state of **M2** or **M3** is accomplished in one embodiment by reducing gate voltages (e.g., word line voltage) while boosting data line and channel voltages (e.g., to supply voltage, V_{cc} , minus V_{th}) for those cells.

FIG. 6 shows one embodiment **600** of a different number of steps of a multi-step pulse being used to program a memory cell(s) to one of four target data states: **E, M1, M2** or **M3**. In this embodiment, each programming pulse **602, 612, 622, . . .**, of a plurality of programming pulses has three voltage levels, starting at a first higher level **604, 614, 624, . . .**, stepping down to a second level **606, 616, 626, . . .**, and to a third level **608, 618, 628, . . .**. In one embodiment, the amount the multi-step pulses step down from the first level to the second level is **605, 615,**

625, . . ., and the amount the multi-step pulses step down from the second level to the third level is **607, 617, 627, . . .**, for pulses **602, 612, and 622**, respectively. The step-down amounts are device specific, and are chosen in one embodiment for the threshold voltage difference between data states. After each multi-step programming pulse, a plurality of verify pulses **610, 620, 630, . . .**, are used to determine whether selected cells have reached their target data states. For further programming, the starting voltage for a next multi-step programming pulse is increased by an amount **(650, 652)** over the starting voltage of the previous multi-step programming pulse in one embodiment. Pulse portions corresponding to pulse levels **604, 614, and 624** may be configured to contribute towards programming cells having a target data state of **M3** while cells having a target data state of **E, M1** or **M2** are inhibited. Pulse portions corresponding to pulse levels **606, 616, and 626** may be configured to contribute towards programming cells having a target data state of **M2** while cells having a target data state of **E, M1** or **M3** are inhibited. Pulse portions corresponding to pulse levels **608, 618, and 628** may be configured to contribute towards programming cells having a target data state of **M1** while cells having a target data state of **E, M2** or **M3** are inhibited.

One embodiment **700** for programming a three level cell (TLC) is shown in FIG. 7. In this embodiment, each programming pulse **702, 712, 722, . . .**, of a plurality of programming pulses has two voltage levels, starting at a first higher level **704, 714, 724, . . .**, and stepping down to a second lower level **706, 716, 726, . . .**. In one embodiment, the amount the multi-step pulses step down is **708, 718, 728, . . .**, for pulses **702, 712, and 722**, respectively. The step-down amounts **708, 718, and 728** are device specific, and are chosen in one embodiment for the threshold voltage difference between data states. After each multi-step programming pulse, a plurality of verify pulses **710, 720, 730, . . .**, are used to determine whether selected cells have reached their target data states. For further programming, the starting voltage for a next multi-step programming pulse is increased by an amount **(750, 752)** over the starting voltage of the previous multi-step programming pulse in one embodiment. The first portion of each multi-step pulse (e.g., portions corresponding to pulse levels **704, 714, 724**) in this embodiment may be configured to contribute towards programming cells having a target data state in an upper half of the target data states (e.g., **T4-T7**) while cells having a target data state in a lower half of the target data states (e.g., **E** and **T1-T3**) are inhibited from programming, and the second portion of each multi-step pulse (e.g., portions corresponding to pulse levels **706, 716, 726**) may be configured to contribute towards programming cells having a target data state in the lower half of the target data states (e.g., **E** and **T1-T3**), while cells having a target data state in the upper half of the target data states (e.g., **T4-T7**) are inhibited from programming.

FIG. 8 shows one embodiment **800** of a different number of steps of a multi-step pulse being used to program a memory cell(s) to one of eight target data states: **E, T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6** or **T7**). In this embodiment, each programming pulse **802, 812, 822, . . .**, of a plurality of programming pulses has four voltage levels, starting at a first level **804, 814, 824, . . .**, stepping down to a second level **806, 816, 826, . . .**, to a third level **808, 818, 828, . . .**, and to a fourth level **810, 820, 830**. The step-down amounts, as described above, are device specific, and are chosen in one embodiment for the threshold voltage difference between data states. After each multi-step programming pulse, a plurality

of verify pulses are used to determine whether selected cells have reached their targeted data states. For further programming, the starting voltage for a next multi-step programming pulse is increased by an amount (not shown) over the starting voltage of the previous multi-step programming pulse in one embodiment, all similarly to that shown above with respect to FIGS. 4, 6, and 7.

Another method **900** for programming a multi-level cell is shown in FIG. 9. Method **900** comprises programming cells with a highest target data state (e.g., the data state associated with the highest threshold voltage level) using a first portion of a programming pulse in block **902**, and after programming cells with a highest target data state in the first portion of the programming pulse, programming cells with a lower target data state during a second portion of the programming pulse in block **904**. It should be understood that more than two levels may be used, as shown above with respect to FIGS. 5 and 8, without departing from the scope of the disclosure.

Another method **1000** of programming a plurality of memory cells is shown in FIG. 10. Method **1000** comprises, in one embodiment, programming a first memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a first programmed data state (e.g., M2 or M3 as shown in FIG. 4; M3 as shown in FIG. 6; T4, T5, T6 or T7 as shown in FIG. 7; and T6 or T7 as shown in FIG. 8) during a first portion of a stepped programming pulse applied to the plurality of memory cells in block **1002**, and programming a second memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a second programmed data state (e.g., M1 as shown in FIG. 4; M2 as shown in FIG. 6; T1, T2 or T3 as shown in FIG. 7; and T4 or T5 as shown in FIG. 8) during a second portion of the stepped programming pulse in block **1004**.

Programming a first memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a first programmed data state during a first portion of a stepped programming pulse comprises in one embodiment programming a first number of memory cells of the plurality of memory cells towards the first programmed data state during the first portion of the stepped programming pulse, programming a second memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a second programmed data state during a second portion of the stepped programming pulse comprises programming a second number of memory cells of the plurality of memory cells towards the second programmed data state during the second portion of the stepped programming pulse. The stepped programming pulse is in one embodiment applied to an access line coupled to the plurality of memory cells.

In one embodiment, shown in FIG. 11, responsive to the first portion of the programming pulse, the second memory cell is inhibited from programming in block **1102**, and responsive to the second portion of the programming pulse, the first memory cell is inhibited from programming in block **1104**. The portions of the programming pulse are at different voltage levels, and in one embodiment the second voltage level is lower than the first voltage level. The first programmed data state is associated with a threshold voltage level that is higher than a threshold voltage level associated with the second programmed data state.

The method **1000** may further comprise in an embodiment **1200** shown in FIG. 12, programming a third memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a third programmed data state (e.g., M3 as shown in FIG. 4; T5, T6 or T7 as shown in FIG. 7; and T7 as shown in FIG. 8) during the first portion of the stepped programming pulse in block **1202**. The third programmed data state is in one embodiment

associated with a threshold voltage level that is higher than the threshold voltage level associated with the second programmed data state.

In one embodiment **1300**, shown in FIG. 13, the method **1200** further comprises, responsive to the second portion of the programming pulse, inhibiting the third memory cell from programming in block **1302**, and responsive to the second portion of the programming pulse, inhibiting the first memory cell from programming in block **1304**. A fourth memory cell is in this embodiment inhibited in block **1306** from programming responsive to a programming pulse when the fourth memory cell is in an erased state. Inhibiting the second memory cell from programming responsive to the first portion of the programming pulse comprises in one embodiment boosting a channel voltage of the second memory cell during the first portion of the programming pulse. Inhibiting the first and third memory cells from programming responsive to the second portion of the programming pulse comprises in one embodiment reducing a voltage level of the stepped programming pulse and increasing channel voltages of the first and third memory cells during the second portion of the programming pulse. Inhibiting the fourth memory cell from programming responsive to the programming pulse comprises in one embodiment boosting a channel voltage of the fourth memory cell.

The method **1000** may also include, in an embodiment **1400** shown in FIG. 14, verifying whether the first memory cell is programmed to the first programmed data state and whether the second memory cell is programmed to the second programmed data state in block **1402**. It is determined in decision block **1404** if the first memory cell is not programmed to the first programmed data state and if the second memory cell is not programmed to the second programmed data state. If that is true, the first memory cell is programmed towards the first programmed data state during a first portion of a second stepped programming pulse applied to the plurality of memory cells in block **1406**, and the second memory cell is programmed towards the second programmed data state during a second portion of the second stepped programming pulse in block **1408**.

The method **1000** may also comprise, in embodiment **1500** shown in FIG. 15, programming a third memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a third programmed data state (e.g., M1 as shown in FIG. 6; and T2 or T3 as shown in FIG. 8) during a third portion of the stepped programming pulse in block **1502**. The programming pulse in this embodiment has a first voltage level during the first portion of the programming pulse, a second voltage level during the second portion of the programming pulse, and a third voltage level during the third portion of the programming pulse, wherein the third voltage level is lower than the second voltage level, wherein the second voltage level is lower than the first voltage level, wherein the first programmed data state is associated with a threshold voltage level that is higher than a threshold voltage level associated with the second programmed data state, and wherein the threshold voltage level associated with the second programmed data state is higher than a threshold voltage level associated with the third programmed data state.

The method of this embodiment may further comprise inhibiting the second and third memory cells from programming responsive to the first portion of the programming pulse in block **1504**, inhibiting the first and third memory cells from programming responsive to the second portion of the programming pulse in block **1506**, inhibiting the first and second memory cells from programming responsive to the third portion of the programming pulse in block **1508**, and

inhibiting a fourth memory cell from programming responsive to the programming pulse, wherein the fourth memory cell is in an erased data state in block **1510**.

Inhibiting the second and third memory cells from programming responsive to the first portion of the programming pulse comprises boosting channel voltages of the second and third memory cells during the first portion of the programming pulse. Inhibiting the first and third memory cells from programming responsive to the second portion of the programming pulse comprises reducing a voltage level of the stepped programming pulse and increasing a channel voltage of the first memory cell during the second portion of the programming pulse, and boosting a channel voltage of the third memory cell during the second portion of the programming pulse. Inhibiting the first and second memory cells from programming responsive to the third portion of the programming pulse comprises reducing the voltage level of the stepped programming pulse and increasing channel voltages of the first and second memory cells during the third portion of the programming pulse. Inhibiting the fourth memory cell from programming responsive to the programming pulse comprises boosting a channel voltage of the fourth memory cell.

In this embodiment, the method may further comprise programming a fourth memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a fourth programmed data state (e.g., **T1**) during a fourth portion of the stepped programming pulse, programming a fifth memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a fifth programmed data state (e.g., **T3**) during the third portion of the stepped programming pulse, programming a sixth memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a sixth programmed data state (e.g., **T5**) during the second portion of the stepped programming pulse, and programming a seventh memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a seventh programmed data state (e.g., **T7**) during the first portion of the stepped programming pulse.

The method **1200** may further comprise, in one embodiment **1600** shown in FIG. **16**, programming a fourth memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a fourth programmed data state (FIG. **7**→**T6**) and programming a fifth memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a fifth programmed data state (FIG. **7**→**T7**) during the first portion of the stepped programming pulse in block **1602**. The fourth programmed data state is associated with a threshold voltage level that is higher than the threshold voltage level associated with the third programmed data state, and the fifth programmed data state is associated with a threshold voltage level that is higher than the threshold voltage level associated with the fourth programmed data state.

With the embodiments of the present disclosure, the number of programming pulses used to program a memory is decreased. Further, the amount of power consumed in the programming process is also decreased since programming cells to multiple data states is accomplished without discharging and pumping up word lines between operations targeted towards programming cells having a respective specific target data state.

In a typical programming sequence a number of programming pulses for four-level MLC (four data states) is determined to be:

$$[(VgVt_{max}+M3Vt)-(VgVt_{min}+M1Vt)]/step\ size$$

where $VgVt$ is the word line voltage– the threshold voltage, in one embodiment 20 Volts to program to a Vt of 4 Volts, making then $VgVt=16$. $VgVt_{max}$ is the largest difference

between word line voltage and desired threshold voltage, and $VgVt_{min}$ is the smallest difference between word line voltage and desired threshold voltage.

The embodiments of the present disclosure may also reduce the amount of program disturb seen by **M1** cells during programming of **M2** and **M3** cells, since **M1** cells are programmed after **M2** and **M3** cells. Also, overall program disturb may be reduced since fewer program pulses and a shorter program time are used. Further, overall cell-to-cell coupling along a same word line may be reduced since cells targeted for programming are programmed together regardless of their targeted data state.

CONCLUSION

In summary, one or more embodiments of the disclosure show cells targeted for programming being programmed during each programming pulse. This is accomplished in one embodiment using a multi-step programming pulse that programs cells having a higher target data state with a first portion of the programming pulse and that contributes towards programming cells having a lower target data state during a second portion of the programming pulse.

Although specific embodiments have been illustrated and described herein, it will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that any arrangement that is calculated to achieve the same purpose may be substituted for the specific embodiments shown. Many adaptations of the disclosure will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art. Accordingly, this application is intended to cover any adaptations or variations of the disclosure.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of programming a memory device, comprising:

applying a plurality of programming pulses to an access line coupled to a control gate of each of a plurality of cells of the memory device to be programmed, wherein each programming pulse of the plurality of programming pulses comprises a first portion that contributes towards programming a first cell of the plurality of cells to a first data state of a plurality of data states and a second portion subsequent to the first portion that contributes towards programming a second cell of the plurality of cells to a second data state of the plurality of data states, wherein the first portion of each programming pulse of the plurality of programming pulses has a higher voltage than the second portion of each programming pulse of the plurality of programming pulses.

2. The method of claim **1**, wherein the first data state is associated with a first threshold voltage level and the second data state is associated with a second threshold voltage level, wherein the first threshold voltage level is higher than the second threshold voltage level.

3. The method of claim **2**, wherein the first portion that contributes towards programming the first cell of the plurality of cells to the first data state moves a threshold voltage of the first cell towards the first threshold voltage level, wherein second portion that contributes towards programming the second cell of the plurality of cells to the second data state moves a threshold voltage of the second cell towards the second threshold voltage level.

4. The method of claim **1**, wherein the second cell is inhibited from programming during the first portion of the programming pulse.

5. The method of claim **4**, wherein the second cell being inhibited from programming during the first portion of the

11

programming pulse comprises boosting a channel voltage of the second cell during the first portion of the programming pulse.

6. A method of programming a multi-level memory, comprising:

programming first cells towards a first threshold voltage using a first portion of a programming pulse that is applied to an access line;

after programming the first cells towards the first threshold voltage using the first portion of the programming pulse that is applied to the access line, programming second cells towards a second threshold voltage lower than the first threshold voltage using a second portion of the programming pulse that is applied to the access line having a voltage level lower than the first portion of the programming pulse that is applied to the access line;

wherein the access line to which the programming pulse is applied is coupled to a control gate of each of the first memory cells and each of the second memory cells.

7. The method of claim **6**, wherein the first threshold voltage is in a highest threshold voltage distribution.

8. A memory device, comprising:

an array of memory cells; and

a controller configured to cause a plurality of programming pulses to be applied to an access line coupled to a control gate of each of plurality of cells of the memory device to be programmed, wherein each programming pulse of the plurality of programming pulses comprises a first portion that is to move a threshold voltage of a first cell of the plurality of cells towards a first threshold voltage level associated with a first data state and a second portion subsequent to the first portion that is to move a threshold voltage of a second cell of the plurality of cell towards a second threshold voltage level associated with a second data state, wherein the first portion of each programming pulse of the plurality of programming pulses has a higher voltage than the second portion of each programming pulse of the plurality of programming pulses.

9. A memory device, comprising:

an array of memory cells; and

a controller configured to program first cells towards a first threshold voltage using a first portion of a programming pulse applied to an access line, and after programming the first cells towards the first threshold voltage using the first portion of the programming pulse applied to the access line, to program second cells towards a second threshold voltage lower than the first threshold voltage using a second portion of the programming pulse applied to the access line having a voltage level lower than the first portion of the programming pulse applied to the access line;

wherein the access line to which the programming pulse is applied is coupled to a control gate of each of the first memory cells and each of the second memory cells.

10. The memory device of claim **9**, wherein the first threshold voltage is in a highest threshold voltage distribution.

11. A method of programming a plurality of memory cells, comprising:

programming a first memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a first programmed data state during a first portion of a stepped programming pulse applied to an access line; and

after programming the first memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards the first programmed data state

12

during the first portion of the stepped programming pulse, programming a second memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a second programmed data state during a second portion of the stepped programming pulse;

wherein the first portion of the stepped programming pulse is at a higher voltage level than the second portion of the stepped programming pulse; and

wherein the access line is coupled to a control gate of each of the plurality of memory cells.

12. The method of claim **11**, further comprising:

inhibiting the second memory cell from programming responsive to the first portion of the stepped programming pulse; and

inhibiting the first memory cell from programming responsive to the second portion of the stepped programming pulse.

13. The method of claim **12**, wherein the first programmed data state is associated with a threshold voltage level that is higher than a threshold voltage level associated with the second programmed data state.

14. The method of claim **13**, further comprising programming a third memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a third programmed data state during the first portion of the stepped programming pulse, wherein the third programmed data state is associated with a threshold voltage level that is higher than the threshold voltage level associated with the second programmed data state.

15. The method of claim **14**, further comprising:

programming a fourth memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a fourth programmed data state and programming a fifth memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a fifth programmed data state during the first portion of the stepped programming pulse, wherein the fourth programmed data state is associated with a threshold voltage level that is higher than the threshold voltage level associated with the third programmed data state, and wherein the fifth programmed data state is associated with a threshold voltage level that is higher than the threshold voltage level associated with the fourth programmed data state.

16. The method of claim **14**, further comprising:

inhibiting the third memory cell from programming responsive to the second portion of the stepped programming pulse; and

inhibiting a fourth memory cell of the plurality of memory cells from programming responsive to the stepped programming pulse, wherein the fourth memory cell is in an erased data state.

17. The method of claim **16**, wherein:

inhibiting the second memory cell from programming responsive to the first portion of the stepped programming pulse comprises boosting a channel voltage of the second memory cell during the first portion of the stepped programming pulse;

inhibiting the first and third memory cells from programming responsive to the second portion of the stepped programming pulse comprises reducing a voltage level of the stepped programming pulse and increasing channel voltages of the first and third memory cells during the second portion of the stepped programming pulse; and

inhibiting the fourth memory cell from programming responsive to the stepped programming pulse comprises boosting a channel voltage of the fourth memory cell.

13

18. The method of claim 11, wherein the stepped programming pulse comprises a first stepped programming pulse and wherein the method further comprises:

verifying whether the first memory cell is programmed to the first programmed data state and whether the second memory cell is programmed to the second programmed data state; and

if the first memory cell is not programmed to the first programmed data state and if the second memory cell is not programmed to the second programmed data state:

programming the first memory cell towards the first programmed data state during a first portion of a second stepped programming pulse applied to the access line; and

programming the second memory cell towards the second programmed data state during a second portion of the second stepped programming pulse.

19. The method of claim 11, further comprising: programming a third memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a third programmed data state during a third portion of the stepped programming pulse.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the third portion of the stepped programming pulse is at a lower voltage level than the second portion of the stepped programming pulse.

21. The method of claim 20, further comprising:

inhibiting the second and third memory cells from programming responsive to the first portion of the stepped programming pulse;

inhibiting the first and third memory cells from programming responsive to the second portion of the stepped programming pulse;

inhibiting the first and second memory cells from programming responsive to the third portion of the stepped programming pulse; and

inhibiting a fourth memory cell from programming responsive to the stepped programming pulse, wherein the fourth memory cell is in an erased data state.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein:

inhibiting the second and third memory cells from programming responsive to the first portion of the stepped programming pulse comprises boosting channel voltages of the second and third memory cells during the first portion of the stepped programming pulse;

inhibiting the first and third memory cells from programming responsive to the second portion of the stepped programming pulse comprises:

14

reducing a voltage level of the stepped programming pulse and increasing a channel voltage of the first memory cell during the second portion of the stepped programming pulse; and

boosting a channel voltage of the third memory cell during the second portion of the stepped programming pulse;

inhibiting the first and second memory cells from programming responsive to the third portion of the stepped programming pulse comprises reducing the voltage level of the stepped programming pulse and increasing channel voltages of the first and second memory cells during the third portion of the stepped programming pulse; and

inhibiting the fourth memory cell from programming responsive to the stepped programming pulse comprises boosting a channel voltage of the fourth memory cell.

23. The method of claim 19, further comprising:

programming a fourth memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a fourth programmed data state during a fourth portion of the stepped programming pulse;

programming a fifth memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a fifth programmed data state during the third portion of the stepped programming pulse;

programming a sixth memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a sixth programmed data state during the second portion of the stepped programming pulse; and

programming a seventh memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards a seventh programmed data state during the first portion of the stepped programming pulse.

24. The method of claim 11, wherein:

programming the first memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards the first programmed data state during the first portion of the stepped programming pulse comprises programming a first number of memory cells of the plurality of memory cells towards the first programmed data state during the first portion of the stepped programming pulse; and

programming the second memory cell of the plurality of memory cells towards the second programmed data state during the second portion of the stepped programming pulse comprises programming a second number of memory cells of the plurality of memory cells towards the second programmed data state during the second portion of the stepped programming pulse.

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UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO. : 9,767,894 B2
APPLICATION NO. : 14/299074
DATED : September 19, 2017
INVENTOR(S) : Tang et al.

Page 1 of 1

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

In the Claims

Column 11, Claim 8, Line 27, delete "of plurality" and insert in place thereof --of a plurality--.

Signed and Sealed this
Third Day of April, 2018



Andrei Iancu
Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office